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## HONOR: A PHILOSOPHICALLY PARSED ASSESSMENT OF HONOR AND ARGUMENTS CONCERNING ITS MORAL FUNCTIONS

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Honor: A Philosophically Parsed Assessment of Honor and Arguments Concerning Its Moral  
Functions

**Abstract**

Honor is a concept familiar to many, yet it can be difficult to articulate. In this thesis, the topic of honor is first explored as a philosophical and social structure. Then, using this structure, an ideal conception of honor is argued. For the formation and support of a functional honor theory, major components of honor are defined by examining and integrating the opinions of philosophers past and present. Terms defined include Individual and Group, as well as Internal behavior and External behavior. These establish honor as a mechanism for social motivation, because moral values that are idealized in a code of honor incentivize certain types of behavior. Next, the arguments for two ideal values for a culture to honor are discussed, followed by a response to potential objections. These two moral values are Personal Responsibility and Humility, which are both parsed by Aristotle's system of lack, mean, and excess. The discussions of these two values overlap to some degree. Principally, however, Personal Responsibility is debated from the perspective of justice theory (such as the one proposed by Tamler Sommers in *Why Honor Matters*), whereas Humility is chiefly discussed within the

context of religion (primarily that of Islam). A recurring theme throughout is the ability of these two moral values to compensate for the other's weaknesses. All arguments in support of the thesis that Personal Responsibility and Humility are the ideal values for a culture to honor are measured by a rubric that assesses the practical success of these values. This criterion is the values' capability to avoid honor violence.

### **Introduction: Complex Honor**

Honor is a slippery thing. It masquerades by many names, past and present, and does not mean the same thing in all contexts. It is seen in literature, religious texts, and epic poems alike. Honor presents a unique challenge as a topic of a persuasive essay: it has no singular definition that extends much farther than "reputation." Thus, any writer attempting to build arguments about it must first establish their own foundation of what honor is. The masked challenge here is that it is still up for debate. For instance, the most recent of my sources is a seven-chapter book published in 2018 (*Why Honor Matters*). As Frank Henderson Stewart reminds the reader in his own book *Honor*, "It may not be clear why some things count as honor and others do not, why certain things are grouped together and others excluded from the grouping" (5).

It is plain that not only does an author writing about honor need to explore the data required for their arguments, but they must also thoroughly examine the philosophical literature about honor's function and structure. Many have tried their hand at encapsulating what honor is. It seems the more one knows about it, the less easily it can be summarized. Therefore, I am arguing doubly: I wish to persuade you of my explanation for honor, and furthermore, I wish to succeed in justifying my thesis that is drawn from my exegesis of honor: Personal Responsibility and Humility are the ideal values for a culture to honor.

### **Background: Honor Theory**

To understand the future arguments about honor, one must first understand their foundation. For this essay about “this most elusive of social concepts,” a theory of honor is in use that is both self-made and has academically corroborated aspects (qtd. in Stewart 5). It contains the important variable of idealized values, has contemporary relevance, and includes semantic nuances. Each of these topics will be addressed for the sake of well-rounded comprehension.

To set the stage, every concept of honor functions through a code of honor, which is a set of behavioral rules determining what is and what is not dubbed “honorable” (Stewart 23-24). These rules are extensions of whatever moral values the code of honor esteems. Next, the settings for these codes of honor separate into the Individual and the Group. “Settings” is a term used to describe the two places where codes of honor can be created and followed—within a single person, or within a conglomerate of persons. Honor is inherently social, meaning that for any code of honor to work, there must be at least one other person sharing that code who will laud another who follows it (Sommers 17; Stewart 24). (For added complexity, this means that religions can allow for highly individualistic honor—a deity can be this praising figure.) While any person can author their own code of honor, it is the popular code of honor that holds the most sway. The subcategories of behavior that these codes of honor can incentivize branch into the Internal and the External (these terms will be capitalized for sake of clarity). Massive variation can exist between different codes of honor, sometimes to such a degree that two conceptions of honor can appear to not be related at all, but the strength of this proposed theory of honor is its capability to provide an explanation for each.

Codes of honor, the first cog of honor's mechanics, are the epitome of what is viewed as ideal for emulation. With more detailed phraseology, a code of honor is a conceptualized standard for behavior based upon socially honored values, which is viewed as favorable (i.e., honorable) when adhered to and uncommendable (i.e., dishonorable) when deviated from (Stewart 24). Here, the distinction is that it is the values constituting the code that define the relevant notion of honor, not the other way around. Honor is capable of changing hues, as it is redefined by what values it promotes. Any given behavior may be awarded merit under one code of honor but discredited under another. However, this is because what truly defines honor is its structure of socially elevating values, not any values it necessarily entails.

The philosopher Aristotle in his *The Nicomachean Ethics* provides a description of virtues: virtues are the balanced center of morality, bookended by excess on one side and lack on the other, both of which are vices. As stated in Book II.6:

Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. (Aristotle 31)

Consider two hypothetical examples of Aristotle's view. A culture may concern itself with perpetuating honesty—but does this imply that every man, woman and child should patrol the streets, announcing their weekly income and the faults of their neighbors, or that one may tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, but only when asked explicitly with no other option? Second, consider what would be possible if a society were to elevate charity as an honored value, perhaps due to a prevalent religion in the region. An average citizen's heartfelt acts of service to a neighbor just as much as an opulently wealthy businessperson's mindless

givings to a non-profit would both be equated to the same level of “honorable.” While codes of honor can laud virtues, what they really promote are values, regardless of whether they are lacking or excessive.

Paradoxically, both the excess and lack of a virtue can coexist, since both can qualify as an honored value if they are elevated for social emulation, as seen above. For an illustration of this, look no further than William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. In Act 3 Scene 2, Mark Antony delivers a scathing speech leveled at the Roman senators responsible for Julius Caesar’s assassination. Shakespeare positions Antony’s words so as to both insult and revile them while still using what is typically understood to be a socially complementary word, “honor.” Here, it is evident that Antony is attacking the senators for either, a) an ill-applied allegiance to one honored value (patriotism), or b) a complete disregard for that honored value (e.g., leaving Caesar alive would have been more beneficial to the stability of the republic). The shades of meaning that being dubbed socially “honorable” can imply are demonstrable through this scene. Indeed, the great question of the play asks whether Antony or the senators are truly honorable in their allegiance to the welfare of Rome. Even if one or all of them sincerely are, their allegiance to the honored value of fatherland produces opposite results in each of the men—to kill Caesar, or not to kill Caesar, that is the question. In other words, how a value manifests within a culture is dependent upon how it is defined. These deviations are unique to every value, but hopefully the concept is sufficiently summarized.

Next, how are the terms Individual and Group defined? The former is a code of honor that is defined or adopted by one person, whereas the latter is a code of honor that is defined, promoted and/or enforced by a group. These are the two contexts in which honor operates (Stewart 25-26). For instance, a member of a community may choose between either creating

their own code of honor, fully (a rarer occurrence) or partially, or they may choose to fully or partially adopt the same moral ideals as their neighbor (24). (Group honor, then, tends to be the popular morality, sprung from whatever values are being presently esteemed by whomever has influence, whether the masses or a monarch.) This is the choice presented to every person by their culture. (This does not imply a moral relativism, but rather, the possibility of a person's code of honor dissenting from the majority's code of honor.) Generally, however, when most people use the term "honor," they are thinking of the Group setting.

Fascinatingly, a "hero" is a direct result of this honor principle. Heroes can emerge in two ways: either they become a renowned champion of the popular morality (e.g., the mythological warrior Achilles, when he is not protesting society by temporarily renouncing its ideal values: *tîmê* and *kleos*), or heroes embody revolutionizers, pioneering a code of honor (differing from that of the Group one) and becoming renowned for it (Homer bk. 1, 6, 9; Vandiver; Bowman 9-10; Sommers 20-25). An example for this latter type of hero would be Martin Luther King, Jr., who may be described as a hero who successfully fought to elevate racial civil equality to the status of an honored value. His heroism is especially visible in harsher contexts, such as the American South. As supported by Carson Clayborne of *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "[his] words introduced to the country a fresh voice, a skillful rhetoric, an inspiring personality, and in time a dynamic new doctrine of civil struggle." Due to this civil struggle, if in the present-day United States a person in their Individual code of honor would choose to oppose the equality of civil rights for all races, the current Group code of honor would widely ostracize them. Ultimately, Group honor is simply the amalgamation of many Individual codes of honor. Group honor assumes a powerful momentum when individuals choose to automatically adopt it and not to create a personal code of honor that deviates too far from it.

All this theorizing is brought into relevance by honor's real-world effects. Above, a code of honor was defined as, "a conceptualized standard for behavior." As posited here, "behavior" is the application of honored values. Behavior as an application of honored values means that codes of honor incentivize certain actions (Sommers 17, 25). Since honor is a social system, those that share the same code of honor praise behavior that follows it and discourage behavior that disregards it. The possible types of honor-driven behavior can be split into two primary categories: the Internal and the External.

The deepest application of honored values is an individual's internalization of them, which produces character-derived actions (Stewart 23-24). Persons that do this act in consistent accordance with the honored values, regardless of whether other members of their honor community (those who adopt the same code of honor) are there to hold them accountable to these values. Also, several persons may have the same code of honor (and therefore, the same values) yet execute obedience to them differently. This may be explained by arguing that the more an individual holds a value to be a personal moral authority, the more that person obeys the value in all circumstances. In other words, actions from the Internal symbolize an authentic belief in the values a person honors, meaning they can be expected to follow them even without witness. Typically, this is what is dubbed one's "character," whether positively or negatively.

A secondary application of honored values is behavior that is amputated from what the individual truly feels about these values. Instead, these External demonstrations of honored values are done for appearances' sake, but they can range from shallow empty headedness to willful manipulation of the rest of the honor community. Suppose there is an individual who does not authentically believe the values in their code of honor. If one were to observe this person while they believed themselves to be alone, the odds are that they would not choose the



same actions in consonant with these honored values. Things done to “save face” or to maintain a “good reputation” are phrases that pull these familiar situations to mind (Stewart 25-28). A nuance here is that a person of disciplined character may choose to act Externally as they “know they should” and wait for their heart to catch up with their honorable actions later, but this assumes some sort of private intention from a person and is thus virtually indiscernible from the outside.

Regardless, to illustrate the divide between behavior in private and what is socially respected, consider this situation from Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*: the character Anne Elliot sees a letter that was not meant for her and contains sensitive information. Anne realizes:

She was obliged to recollect that her seeing the letter was a violation of the laws of honour, that no one ought to be judged or to be known by such testimonies, that no private correspondence could bear the eye of others. (Shapard 386)

Despite her dishonorable behavior, Anne clearly has a sense of how propriety dictates she ought to behave, and she acknowledges this divide between that obligation and her discovery of another’s personal information.

To summarize, a person’s behavior builds their reputation. This behavior may stem either from true reverence for the values in their code of honor or from mere outward acknowledgement of them. Also, a person’s code of honor may be either adopted from the Group or shaped at the Individual level. As an aside, note that the value of individualism is distinct from the term Individual, as the latter describes the context in which a code of honor is held. Also, individualism can be honored at the Group level when the behaviors that stem from it do not isolate single persons, but rather encourage self-reliance, courage, and the like. This is

observable in American history (Bowman 80-86). Either way, honor, functioning as a social system, can only be bestowed by others who share the same code of honor.

It is important to note that there is a category of honorable External behavior that has very little to do with philosophically rationalized morality. These are recognized as customs, traditions, cultural “norms,” titles, or polite manners. All of these are certain staples of behavior that exist within cultures in a variety so incredible, they can seem absurd to those unfamiliar with them. What are they? These are External behaviors that have become a communal way of acknowledging honored values. For instance, working again through the lens of Jane Austen’s novels, the society depicted in *Northanger Abbey* honors chastity. When a family friend frowns upon some of the young men and women for their decision to travel unaccompanied, Catherine Morland is grateful that she had only done so once herself and rules that it was a mistake (73). There is nothing inherently unchaste about two single adults taking a carriage ride alone together, but doing so would be perceived by members of this honor community as an offense to that value, however indirectly.

When these customs begin to be esteemed as values in themselves, they can undergo the transformation from innocently benign to threateningly dangerous. If one could be imprisoned for committing a social *faux pas*, then one knows that an External behavior has been weaponized unnaturally. Additionally, traditions can be a red flag for a culture’s change or decline from its honored values. This occurs when a severance between common External behavior and the community’s actually honored values is widely detectable. If, for example, one were to ask a mid-nineteenth-century layperson in England, “Why are unmarried men and women not to ride unaccompanied in carriages together?” and the answer is flatly, “That’s just the way it’s done,” then one knows that chastity itself is no longer acknowledged nor supported as a value of popular

morality in that person's society. Customs and traditions may be surprisingly effective at maintaining echoes of the honored value they represent; however, they cannot continue to persist within their honor communities without actual support from the members of the community.

A touchy in-between of the two settings for codes of honor (Individual and Group) is religion, which claims some commonalities with each. Religions (primarily Western ones) each view themselves as the exclusively correct system of belief concerning, among other things, the ideals for interactions between individuals (a part of morality). Religions are, if you will, ready-made sets of values which often compete to influence the overarching honored values in a culture. Generally, religions prioritize in their codes of honor Internal behaviors, but they may just as equally list External actions in line with their purported values (such as liturgies and rituals). As a distinction, conformity to culturally popular values is called "honor," but conformity to religiously-promoted values is more aptly described as "piety." Piety may become an honored value depending upon the degree of the intersection between a society and its predominant religion. This being said, the unavoidable trepidation in such an intersection occurring is that External behaviors are incentivized excessively (as in a theocracy). The potential cause of this danger has two parts: first, religions (systems of belief) are meant to begin and initially take effect inwardly within a person, not begin as something External. Second, however, glorifying a religion as a symbol of honor encourages unctuous outward demonstrations of it.

This leads to a worthwhile statement concerning honor's dangers. *Honōris periculī*, as they may be called using Latin, stem from honor's capacity for moral motivation and influence within a culture. Dangerous cultures can form when a code of honor promotes values that encourage violent Internal or External behaviors. (As a reminder, Internal behavior is action

driven by sincere belief in an honored value, whereas External behavior is superficial imitation of an honored value.) Conversely, codes of honor can also contribute to dangerous cultures when the prevailing code of honor is unspoken yet harsh. This can be a subtle lethality. It is improbable if not impossible for honor to ever be fully extinguished, even when a society such as the interconnected North American and Western European one likes to think itself post-honor (Bowman 260-261). Old customs may be abolished, new values may be instilled, but functionally, people interact with each other in the same way. The workings of honor are still in existence even if they are not called such. It is a self-deception for a populace to postulate superiority to their ancestors because “people today” have moved beyond honor. This only serves to numb a culture’s sensitivity to the values they honor and to allow the opportunity for popular morality to become an easily received Trojan horse. In addition, popular honor is an enticing answer to a person’s desire for community. It satisfies the wish for acceptance with an offer of Group unity—one that can quite easily become uniformity or malevolent social control, if harnessed by a dictator or other controlling entity.

Finally, here is a disclaimer to clarify how some miscellaneous derivative uses of the word “honor” are consistent with and fit into this honor theory. Phrases that reference the social workings of honor are titles such as “Your Honor” for judges or statesmen. By addressing someone as “Your Honor,” the implication is that they are a model replicator of the relevant honor ideals, and it is often attached to an office that is considered conjoined to a society’s morality. Also, the very existence of “honors education” in the forms of classes and colleges indicates a societal elevation of advanced academics—the actual efficacy of such programs aside (Miner 79). As for how this essay’s proposed honor system transposes to a massive social scale (such as international relations), many nuances are simplified and the only individuals that matter

are the ones directly representative of a colossal collective. Ironically, this honor typically devolves to a primally simplistic you-punched-me-so-I-get-to-hit-you-back, “you started it” system (Bowman 171, 303).

As a last example from a religion, the use of “honor” as verb, as in the Christian Bible’s “Honor your father and your mother” from Exodus 20.12a, or “Honor the Lord from your wealth” from Proverbs 3.9a, demonstrates the conferrence of honor to a person or figure (*New American Standard Bible*). In the first instance, the sense is that of giving one’s parents the respect due them as if they were model imitators of the honored ideals of Christianity; the second example carries a slightly higher tone, given that Christianity views the Lord as the perfect executor of its honored values, and it seems to indicate a reminder to recognize the Christian God’s ideal standard for behavior (in this case, with one’s wealth). Essentially, to honor a person, a person’s actions, or a person’s deity means simply to hold that thing in esteem as something worth respect, or, in some scenarios, emulation.

In the end, the semantics of “honor” are significant and integrated evidence for this honor theory. This being said, the intricacies of the word’s translingual etymology are expansive and scholarly—scholarly and expansive to such a degree that acknowledgement is the only due credit the topic can be afforded in this essay. For further considerations of this, examine contemporary honor culture’s novel form of fame: celebrity. (This is something commented on at length in Chapter Ten of James Bowman’s *Honor: A History*, named *The Aristocracy of Feeling: Honor as a Celebrity*.) This concludes the list of miscellaneous uses of the word “honor.” While there are many, they are each consistent with the provided theory of honor.

Now it is necessary to summarize this discussion on the proposed honor theory as a whole. There is great variation across the many historical functions of honor, but their

consistencies are identifiable as the framework of honor as a system, which is not the same as the rotating and fluctuating values honor assumes in these different cultures. A society's code of honor, obvious or unspoken, decides what is socially accepted and rejected. All persons hold their own code of honor (Individual), which can be in varying degrees of alignment with the collective's code of honor (Group). What, then, is the purpose and function of honor as a social system? It is a motivator. Honor, as a motivator and social system, incentivizes certain behavior, whether Internal or External (Sommers 8, 13). Certain behaviors are glorified based upon the values esteemed in a code of honor—most powerfully so as a popular morality. The great—indeed, defining—consistency of honor is that it commends conformity and condemns contradiction.

### **Argument: Ideal Values to Honor**

The exposition of this honor theory was necessary for the arguments to come because they use its structure. (The arguments assume honor endemically motivates certain behaviors, among other details.) The thesis to be proven is this: Personal Responsibility and Humility are the ideal values for a culture to honor. The following arguments will begin by defining and parsing these values, then transition to revolve around how these two values interact with the principle of justice and with the pitfalls of religion. The arguments also assert that Personal Responsibility and Humility are practically and morally the most beneficial values for a culture to idealize. The reasons in support and refutation of these points will be organized around Aristotle's aforementioned analysis of values in excess and in deficiency. In addition, what behavior(s) are incentivized by a value, Internal or External, will be a key point of discussion. What is the criterion for grading the success of the two values of Personal Responsibility and Humility? They must be proven capable of avoiding extremes of honorable behavior—both the

lack and the excess. Extremes of honorable behavior can take many forms, but one of the most crucial to address is that of honor violence.

First is the defense of Personal Responsibility as an ideal value for a culture to honor. To begin with a definition, “responsibility” is “moral, legal, or mental accountability,” as defined by *Merriam-Webster*. This definition plus the word “personal” yields the proper understanding for this value: Personal Responsibility is a person’s accountability for their committed actions.

Next, as a moral value, its deficiency may be called carelessness and its excess controllingness (both of which will be addressed in further measure in Personal Responsibility’s refutation). In order to justify labeling Personal Responsibility “ideal,” its primary benefit, its relationship with the principle of justice, and its persisting relevance to today will be defended.

The primary benefit of Personal Responsibility as an honored value is that it preserves the base meaningfulness of honor as a system. Since this value is more or less a person’s accountability for their committed actions, it aids honor in attaching merit or discredit to the responsible entity. This fulfills honor’s function, since honor is a culture’s way of estimating each person’s general worth and distinction, also known as reputation (Bowman 202). If honor could not be attached to an individual, then honor would have very little social function at all, if any.

This is why some scholars, such as Frank Henderson Stewart or Tamler Sommers, label Personal Responsibility an endemic property of honor. The latter of these two has asserted, “In honor cultures, taking responsibility is a bedrock moral principle” (Sommers 65). This is a solid view, but the argument over whether or not it is an irremovable pillar of honor’s architecture will be put aside. Independent of that debate, encouraging Personal Responsibility as a moral value is a higher issue. For, by honoring Personal Responsibility as a value, an honored virtue is now

created. While this allows potential for its vices to be honored, it also allows the only possibility for its balanced virtue to be honored: a person voluntarily seeking to assume responsibility. However, failing to honor Personal Responsibility removes its entire range of inspired behavior from a code of honor. If Personal Responsibility is excluded from the popular code of honor, then the discouragement of its corresponding Internal and External behaviors inevitably occurs. Acts of responsibility of any kind are left unrewarded, and no virtuous mean of taking responsibility would be celebrated either.

What do Personal Responsibility's Internal and External behaviors look like? Recall that Internal action is driven by sincere belief in an honored value, whereas External action is superficial imitation of an honored value. This means that regardless of why or how it is done, Personal Responsibility has the capability to motivate accountability for actions. This is its primary benefit.

Tamler Sommers is an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Houston and holds a PhD in philosophy from Duke University (Sommers 0, 219-221). In his recent book *Why Honor Matters*, he advocates for the implementation of restorative justice in tandem with a reinvigoration of healthy social honor, which he perceives as stifled by Enlightened liberalism in the Western world (7). Within a section titled *Home of the Shameless*, he discusses Dick Miller's coining of the word "affluenza." This is a term referring to some young Americans' apathy towards or incapacity for taking responsibility for the consequences of their actions (63-69). Sommers agrees with Miller about the reality of such an observation and supplies his own solution. This includes restoring social recognition of appropriate responsibility for the consequences of a person's actions—even for consequences a person did not intend to incur. (This is a theme he returns to in his theory of justice, primarily in the chapters *Honorable Justice*



and *Honor Contained*.) Sommers' aspiration to renew accountability for actions in the next generation seeks to effectively sustain honor, as well as to avoid its lack: casual carelessness.

Moreover, this carelessness that Sommers and I agree in advocating against is highly relevant. It has for decades persisted within the United States of America, leading up to and during the years of the 1960s. How and by what causes is substantiated by James Bowman, who is currently a resident scholar at the Ethics and Public Policy Center. Within his *Honor: A History*, he provides a timeline of the cultural momentum towards the American sexual revolution—a period he labels as a turning point. The probable causes he proposes for the rise of American irresponsibility are these: the increasingly flirtatious entertainment during both World Wars, the infamous *Playboy* magazine's debut in 1953, the notion of radical "freedom" as a kick in the face to Communism, and the off-putting rigidity in the codes of honor of the Axis powers countries, principally Germany and Japan (Bowman 183-188).

In the segment *Sex and Freedom, Not Honor, the Goal of Life*, Bowman argues that "guilt and sin" were remnants from the prior honor culture of America (Bowman 185). This pre-twentieth-century code of honor hearkened back to chivalry's principle of Personal Responsibility. (Chivalry is another code of honor from the past—one that enjoyed its heyday in Europe within the centuries of AD 900 to 1200 (Miner 40-44, 54-55). However, from the 1300s and on, it has been more romanticized.) As Bowman writes: "chivalry could not survive this change in social attitudes...sexual freedom and personal authenticity...were the new values of many in the postwar era" (185). Note the distinction: personal authenticity, not Personal Responsibility, sexual freedom instead of self-regulation.

In the 1960s' United States, the consequence happened to be increased casual sex. Such a change can be viewed either favorably or unfavorably. What is undeniable are the

consequences of this shift. The removal of Personal Responsibility as a social value permits the escalation (or even, extremization) of behaviors from other values otherwise policed by it (such as chastity). This is not to mention the eventual destabilization of honor in the first place (not adhering to any values at all) due to Personal Responsibility's removal.

Thus, Personal Responsibility when honored as a moral ideal serves a dual purpose: it not only spearheads the preservation of honor as a structure, but as an addendum, it initiates a sort of social conscience surrounding flippancy or gravity of behavior. While its lack is carelessness and its excess is controllingness, Personal Responsibility's balanced mean is indispensable to a society. This is because it not only inaugurates any conception of honor, but also, it is fundamental to any justice.

Second is the defense of Humility as an ideal value for a culture to honor. Its deficiency is identified as pride. Its excess is more challenging to phrase, but it can be called self-deprecation producing lack of ownership. For the discussion of Humility, it is crucial to remember that the terms "lack" and "excess" are opposites, but both qualify as a "vice." This is in the sense that pride is the lack of Humility but is also a moral vice.

However, before too deep a foray into this dense eight-letter word, something critical is needed: an accurate introduction and definition of the value as a whole. For this, I turn to an author known for his argument against Humility's foe, pride. Indeed, the theologian C.S. Lewis presents a unique perspective on the vice, announcing it to be "essentially competitive" (Lewis 122). Lewis also asserts that Humility is pride's full "opposite," its antithesis (121). Standing on Lewis' logic, Humility must therefore be essentially noncompetitive. If this is true, how can Humility be rationalized into a code of honor? Does not honor as a system accredit and rank persons based upon behavior? Well, as shall be substantiated, Humility offers unique benefits to

a code of honor. Some of these are that Humility offers a social opportunity only it can provide, it is the supreme check-and-balance for honor extremes, and all this while not being incompatible with Personal Responsibility or justice.

What is this unique social opportunity provided by Humility? Lewis' comment on those possessed by pride (Humility's deficiency) provides an initial clue: "A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you" (124). By the phrase "above you," the author is referring to the Christian God, a figure which, in his worldview, is worthy of emulation (i.e., honoring) because of His pure virtue. However, regardless even of the author's deity, this simple "above you" expertly communicates something: the danger of over-introspection encouraged by some values. Oddly enough, warped Humility is one of these. There are two perversions of Humility: self-deprecation or, paradoxically, over-absorption and obsession with the self. The latter one is Humility's lack. To use Lewis' words to describe this lack, becoming too involved with what is "down" deprives a person of discovering higher moral ideals "above."

What might an "above" moral principle be? Humility too has a balance in between its deficiency and excess. This balance is the accurate, uninflated perception of the self. It allows for a special virtue only accessible via this balance: forgiveness. Forgiveness, an "above" moral principle, is a derivative of Humility, and it is inherently beneficial to the theory of justice as a part of society. This is because it introduces the foreign habit of examining one's own good and bad marks, criticizing one's own applause-driven External behavior, requisite to glancing and gawking at anyone else's. The author of the publication *Ethics for Everyone*, Dr. Michael W. Austin, a professor of philosophy at Eastern Kentucky University, has stated, "Humble people have better social relationships, avoid deception in their social interactions, and they tend to be

forgiving, grateful, and cooperative” (Austin). The unique possibility of forgiveness is Humility’s primary benefit.

Now, Humility’s moral deficiency, balance, and excess have been explained, but what of its behavioral abuses? The idea of Humility’s abuse is a funny thing. Specifically, as illustrated by the two types of behavior, Internal and External, Humility is socially quite difficult to abuse. Lewis posits that an authentically honest man, “will not be thinking about humility; he will not be thinking about himself at all” (128). Theorize, then, about what a fake, External behavior seeking to emulate Humility for glory could look like. Other than contradictorily bragging about one’s own humility or personal littleness, socially toxic things such as aggression or frequent jibes are not remotely within the definition of Humility. Misuse of Humility is possible, certainly, but if its own extremes of pride (deficiency) and lack of self-assertion (excess) are regulated by another value, such as Personal Responsibility, it grows evident that the abuse of Humility is nigh impossible, if not fully so.

The final point considering Humility’s benefits to a code of honor is its ability to be the supreme check-and-balance for honor extremes. For this essay’s purposes, “honor extremes” is being used to refer to any honorable behavior that is taken to an unnatural extreme, whether Internal or External. An example of an extreme behavior is honor violence. In fact, this strength of balanced Humility is an extrapolation based upon what has already been established. If Humility is the realistic acknowledgment of the moral bounds and responsibilities of the self (among other things), then it deftly fights the exaggerated sense of agency some values can potentially provide, such as Personal Responsibility.

What has been said regarding the worth of Humility as an honored value boils down to this: balanced Humility provides unique opportunities and benefits for a system of honor. These

are the possibility of forgiveness, which is compatible with justice and Personal Responsibility, and the capability to avoid violent honor extremes.

All in all, Personal Responsibility and Humility are very arguably the ideal values for a culture to honor. This is due to each contributing unique benefits to a society's code of honor, especially and particularly together (as will be later emphasized and explained). Personal Responsibility is fundamental to the functions of both honor and justice. Humility is compatible with Personal Responsibility, and therefore, honor and justice as well, while also bringing something special to the table: forgiveness. As will be further elaborated, they also meet the criterion of avoiding honor extremes.

Table 1 – Examples parsing Personal Responsibility by degree and behavior type

	<b><u>Internal</u></b>	<b><u>External</u></b>
<b><i>Lack</i></b>	Advocating for neutralization of consequences	Dismissing consequences (likely for others) when convenient
<b><i>Balance</i></b>	Seeking to assume honest accountability	Assuming accountability when observed
<b><i>Excess</i></b>	Hypersensitive to community members' irresponsibility as reflective on oneself	When profitable, saying others should be accountable

Table 2 – Examples parsing Humility by degree and behavior type

	<b><u>Internal</u></b>	<b><u>External</u></b>
<b><i>Lack</i></b>	Belief that oneself is the most significant	Demonstrations of self-prioritization
<b><i>Balance</i></b>	Voluntary accurate assessment of oneself	Awareness to not boast in public
<b><i>Excess</i></b>	Dysfunctional self-deprecation	Pretense of personal insignificance

### **Refutation: Religion and Justice**

Arguments in favor of these two values have been presented, but now the plausible objections must be equally recognized and responded to. It is these refuting arguments that determine the vitality and fortitude of the thesis that Personal Responsibility and Humility are the ideal values for a culture to honor. The arguments opposed to this thesis contend that these values do not sufficiently avoid honor extremes—the rubric for the success of these values. These assertions challenge Personal Responsibility and Humility’s capability to practically balance the other and whether their respective vices are worth the real-world risks of raising their virtues to honor. This refutation is ordered the same as the supporting arguments, discussing Personal Responsibility first, then Humility. Finally, the arguments will be brought into one key summary that addresses the two values’ compatibility.

Beginning with Personal Responsibility, the chief claim against it is that it is potentially over-assertive and obsessive. The argument against this value claims it poses a threatening extreme of honorable behavior. This over-assertion of responsibility is a relevant concern. Afterall, the mal-extension of responsibility means expanding responsibility for oneself to

include responsibility for others—not just for their vices, but even for their virtues. In other words, not ownership of one’s own personal morality, but also ownership for others’ personal morality (Chesler). This is essentially abused authority.

Critics can posit that there are helpful and even kind instances of this: a father coming alongside a son to help bear a self-inflicted burden, or a caretaker assuming duties of an ailing person. These examples, however, do not truly qualify. In the first, a parent is aiding their child in their proper assumption of ownership for their own vices. The latter demonstrates an assistant assuming responsibility for the minutiae and technicalities of life for an ailing person, not their moral responsibilities, however morally done.

No, the argument against Personal Responsibility because of its exaggeration is represented in the still persistent problem of religiously motivated honor violence. This extreme of honorable behavior is often Internal (the violent individuals internalize and believe the value of perverted responsibility) but may also be External (the participating persons are violent for the sake of social status alone). Occurrences of honor violence are observable primarily within countries containing a prominent Muslim presence. A study titled “Social Hostilities Involving Religion” from Pew Research Center in 2011 details the relationship between Muslim presence and so-termed “social hostilities.” Admittedly, this is tricky to quantify, but the researchers successfully delineated and defined four levels (“very high,” “high,” “moderate,” and “low”) utilizing Pew Research Center’s Social Hostilities Index methodology, which:

...measures hostile acts by private individuals, organizations and social groups that restrict religious beliefs and practices. The 10-point index is based on 13 questions used by the Pew Forum to gauge the level of hostilities both between and within religious groups, including mob or sectarian violence, crimes motivated by religious bias, physical

conflict over conversions, harassment over attire for religious reasons and other religion-related intimidation and violence, including terrorism and war. (“Social Hostilities Involving Religion”)

Most importantly, the results of the study detailed the following concerning religious social hostility:

Countries with very high social hostilities have severe levels of violence and intimidation on many or all of the 13 measures that make up the Social Hostilities Index. In Iraq, for example, ongoing sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims frequently led to terrorist acts, including attacks on important religious sites in the country. For instance, more than 60 people died and more than 100 were injured on April 24, 2009, when two female suicide bombers attacked an important Shiite shrine in Baghdad, the Imam Musa al-Kadhim mosque. Many parts of the country also continued to have a lot of public animosity directed at religious minorities, including Christians, Yazidis and Sabeen-Mandaeans.

The key link between these findings and perverted Personal Responsibility is summarized by the United Nations’ High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay. Corroborated by South Korean Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2010 she delivered sobering remarks about these social environments:

Most of the 5,000 honour killings reported to take place every year around the world do not make the news, nor do the other myriad forms of violence inflicted on women and girls...In the name of preserving family ‘honour,’ women and girls are shot, stoned, burned, buried alive, strangled, smothered and knifed to death with horrifying regularity.



Pillay continued to speak about the key exacerbating factor: perpetrators of honor violence in religiously hostile regions may be conferred special recognition or status within their communities, or even within their legal system.

These quotes show an extreme allegiance to honored values. In these situations, one of the honored values must be Personal Responsibility, because the honor violence is committed against others as a reactive “justice” for their wrongdoing. One example is allegedly forsaken chastity (Chesler). Indeed, this is an excess of Personal Responsibility, where in the name of justice, young and middle-aged women are tortured and murdered for any variety of religious impropriety.

Particularly within Islamic culture, there exists a problem of men policing female family member’s perceived social virtue (a woman’s honor). As Phyllis Chesler for *Middle East Quarterly* lays out, “Worldwide, 42 percent of [honor] murders were carried out by multiple perpetrators,” “worldwide, 58 percent of the victims were murdered for being ‘too Western’ and/or for resisting or disobeying cultural and religious expectations,” and (Chesler):

...42 percent of the victims worldwide were murdered for committing an alleged “sexual impropriety”; this refers to victims who had been raped, were allegedly having extra-marital affairs, or who were viewed as “promiscuous” (even where this might not refer to actual sexual promiscuity or even sexual activity). However, in the Muslim world, 57 percent of victims were murdered for this motive as compared to 29 percent in Europe and a small number (9 percent) in North America. (Chesler)

This perverse excess of Personal Responsibility is made manifest in its misdirection towards the violated rather than the violator.

All this being said, why would Personal Responsibility as a promoted societal and honorable value be wanted or welcomed at all? Some genuinely awful consequences appear to be its result—where is the desirability?

First, it must be recollected that honor violence is defined as an extreme behavior done for an honored value. Extremes are capable of being regulated, and extremes are not always widespread. It is relevant to restate that Humility does not allow a person to assert false authority on their neighbor. What the Qur'an or the Bible may have to say about Humility is not at all necessary for this point. By definition, if Humility were being honored as a social value alongside Personal Responsibility, these honor killings would be inconsistent with these communities' codes of honor.

For fair representation, it must be noted that while Muslim-dominated regions may have statistically evident problems with extremes of honorable behavior, Muslims that hold strictly to their faith are not necessarily more or less likely to approve of honor killings ("Muslim Views on Morality"). An example of this is that an overwhelming majority of Muslims disapprove of sexual impropriety. As found in a Pew Research Center survey in 2013:

A strong majority of Muslims in nearly all countries surveyed condemn pre- and extra-marital sex, including three-quarters or more in 29 of the 36 countries where the question was asked. This view is nearly universal in Thailand (99%), Jordan (96%), Lebanon (96%) and Egypt (95%). ("Muslim Views on Morality")

However, this does not evenly equate to approbation for violent behavior in response. A wide swath of opinions exists in Muslim countries:

In four of the seven countries where the question was asked in the Middle East-North Africa region, at least half of Muslims say honor killings of accused men are never

justified: Jordan (81%), Morocco (64%), Tunisia (62%) and Lebanon (55%)...But in only two countries in the region – Morocco (65%) and Tunisia (57%) – does a majority reject honor killings of accused women. In the other countries surveyed in the region, the percentage of Muslims who reject honor killings of women ranges from 45% in Lebanon to 22% in Iraq.

As indicated by these statistics, in these Muslim regions the honoring of chastity does not directly equate to favoring honor violence as an answer to it.

In the end, while connections can be made between cultures where a majority of honor violence occurs and Muslim-dominated countries, there is such statistical variation that via this data a critic cannot argue that Personal Responsibility always results in an extreme. Even if this connection could be undeniably established, there is still a distinction in support of this essay's thesis. Codes of honor that incentivize individuals to breach their realm of authority and to impose consequences onto others are, by definition, not codes of honor that also esteem Humility. Humility as a value nullifies this excess of Personal Responsibility by restraining individuals to their appropriate realm of moral authority.

Transitioning to Humility and the refutation against it, this value's central criticism rises from scholars like Tamler Sommers. These arguments are rare, but they tend to involve interpretations of Humility that conflate its balanced mean with its excess. For the sake of simplicity, this refutation will follow Sommers' qualms with Humility.

Sommers reasons that Humility is something that reduces self-importance, and that reducing self-importance abolishes meaningful justice between people (Sommers 134-145). As he advocates, "You are what you're willing to avenge" (qtd. in Sommers 142). For fair representation of his opinion, it must be duly noted that he disavows vigilantism. However, he

also does not define honor violence as an extreme in itself (143). Overall, Sommers supports persons having a strong sense of self. A strong sense of self, according to Sommers, in turn justifies the retribution of actions against the self.

As presented in a review of Sommers' *Why Honor Matters* by Aubrey C. Spivey in *Reason Papers*, Sommers stresses that those who "fail to take responsibility" are also those who "expect inherent respect" (88). In Sommers' view, both irresponsibility and the bestowal of unearned respect are reprehensible. Also, from his perspective, the way in which irresponsibility and the granting of unearned respect occur is through an exploitation of the concept of human dignity (Sommers 26-28, 163-165). If every person has inherent dignity, every person has inherent worth. He argues that this idea makes it easy for persons to lazily claim that they deserve unfounded respect and, furthermore, that they are above the consequences of their actions. Here, in his disapproval of dignity, Sommers mistakes the excess of Humility for its balance.

In his dismantling of the value of human dignity, Sommers lists what are excesses of Humility. Ironically enough, he does not think dignity and responsibility to be incompatible, but rather, he proposes Personal Responsibility as a check-and-balance for dignity (153-183). As supported in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, "...the mean is proper pride, the excess is known as a sort of 'empty vanity', and the deficiency is undue humility" (32). There's the rub. Sommers' misdefinition of "dignity" is really what is Humility's deficiency. Following this syllogism, it can be seen that Humility is not some great bearer of apathy. Rather, Humility is capable of existing in excess—an excess perfectly restrained by Personal Responsibility, making it compatible with the principle of justice.

As a value pair, Personal Responsibility and Humility balance and mediate one another perfectly. For instance, they even somewhat balance in vices (Table 1; Table 2). Whatever damage could be done to justice by Personal Responsibility's deficiency is opposed by Humility's excess. Whatever damage could be done to justice by Personal Responsibility's excess is countered by Humility's deficiency. When both these values are esteemed in a culture's code of honor, they are able to consistently and drastically compensate for each other. Hence, it can be argued that Personal Responsibility and Humility meet not only the rubric of avoiding honor extremes, but also of maintaining effective justice. Personal Responsibility is apathy's abolisher; Humility is pride's tamer.

### **Conclusion: Honor Now**

The thesis of this essay is that Personal Responsibility and Humility are the ideal values for a culture to honor. By arguing their success at avoiding honor extremes, I have applied my own honor theory, Tamler Sommers' justice theory, pages of historical research, philosophical reasoning, and religious complexities. Personal Responsibility and Humility had their lacks, means, and excesses examined. These were then cross-examined by their ability to avoid honor extremes and to benefit society, demonstrating their nullification of *honōris periculū*, or "dangers of honor."

As a complex and elusive concept, I hope that in the very least I have been able to persuade my audience of honor's present-day relevance. Honor is powerful and can incentivize virtue or vices, lack or excess. Without reaching for the past or romanticizing the present, I suggest that all persons ought to take stock of what values they hold dear and what behavior and actions they wish to see praised.

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